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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: HAITIANS CONSIDER LEAVING; PUT AFFAIRS IN ORDER

1. While Haiti has yet to see a run on airline tickets and long lines at the Dominican border, many Haitians have been putting their affairs in order or at least hedging their bets. Eight locally engaged staff have resigned at USAID in the past four months, four since the kidnapping of a USAID employee in early May. Within the Embassy, two Consular LES and two GSO workers have resigned this month, and one IT systems staff member has given notice of his impending immigration to Canada. Approximately eight local guard force employees have left Haiti with their families in the past few months due to insecurity, including three bodyguards. In the larger community, the Consular Section has recently seen an increase in inquiries to NIV for premature visa renewals, as well as an increase in walk-ins to ACS by Amcits looking for visas for their domestic employees. An American Airlines representative told EconCouns that their planes departing Haiti are carrying at least ten percent more passengers than normal for this time of year, which she attributed almost entirely to emigration. Lastly, after a four month lull, the Coast Guard has intercepted and repatriated 310 migrants in the past month.

2. These data hardly represent statistical evidence of an impending mass exodus. According to the Groupe d'Appui Aux Repatries et Refugies (GARR), a non-profit that supports refugees and repatriated Haitians, activity at the Dominican border crossings has been normal, and more Haitians are being returned by the Dominicans than are leaving. However, anecdotal reports from the political elite, the business community, and the Haitian middle class corroborate this trend of preparation to leave Haiti. Many LES at post, including at least 11 in the Management section, have laid all of the groundwork for a swift and permanent departure should the situation deteriorate further. Other Haitians who lack the means or cannot easily uproot are at least sending their children out of the country for the summer. In previous instances of unrest, Haitians have scoffed at American drawdowns and travel warnings, but they appear to be taking this one more seriously.

3. COMMENT. One statement often heard these days is "This is the worst it has ever been." Whether this is an example of Haiti's affinity for hyperbole or a testament to her remarkable tolerance for misery, room still exists for the situation to get even worse. Haitians talk a mean game about their plans to pack it in if things do not change, but they rarely back it up. Post believes that the situation may indeed be different this time. Violent crime, carjackings and kidnappings are rampant and now appear to indiscriminately target Haitians and foreigners alike. The Embassy's LES are extremely worried. The economy continues to languish and risks being crippled by gang activities in the industrial areas. Unfortunately, the only Haitians who are not looking for a way out are the ones who stand to profit from the anarchy - the greedy, the corrupt, and the power-hungry. However, Haitians are cognizant of the fact that it would not take much to put an end to the current disorder, which may be what is holding them in place. They may be pinning their hopes on improved performance by MINUSTAH or on the intervention of a third party. END COMMENT.
FOLEY